DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 147 031 PS 009 686

AUTHOR Biduson, Bernice T.; And Others
TITLE Single Versus Multiple Parenting: Implications for Infant...
SPONS AGENCY Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.; National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md.; Public Health Service (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Aug 77
GRANT CC-B-3970-04; NIMH-K05-MH-70541-05; USPHS-2-R01-MH-24947-04
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (85th, San Francisco, California, August 26-30, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Child Rearing; Cognitive Development; Collective Settlements; *Comparative Analysis; Early Experience; Emotional Development; *Family Influence; *Infants; *Life Style; Motor Development; Nuclear Family; One Parent Family; Preschool Education; Research; Social Development

ABSTRACT

This study, part of a naturalistic longitudinal study of infants being reared in a variety of family life styles, attempted to establish the extent to which differing parenting patterns affected early developmental outcomes. Subjects were 200 infants: 50 of single mothers who headed their family units, 50 of mothers in communal living groups, and 100 of two-parent nuclear families. All parents were Caucasian and from middle class or stable working class families. Infant development was assessed at eight months and one year of age. Four measures were derived from scores obtained on the mental and motor Bayley Scales of Infant Development (administered at eight months and one year) and four from the Stranger Situation Test (administered at one year). Parenting mode was analyzed in relation to Bayley and Stranger Test Scores, and 52 items on caretaking practices gleaned from home observation and parent reports. Although results indicated significant but not strong relationships between Bayley Scores and three of the caretaking factors, it was concluded that at one year of age, children being reared in widely varying life styles do not differ significantly on measures of intellectual development or separation responses. (SB)

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SINGLE VERSUS MULTIPLE PARENTING -- IMPLICATIONS FOR INFANCY[1,2]

Bernice T. Eiduson, Ph.D.

Irla Lee Zimmerman, Ph.D.

Maurine Bernstein, R.N.

Department of Psychiatry

University of California, Los Angeles

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[1] This work is supported in part by the National Institute of Mental Health Research Scientist Career Award No. 5 K05 MH 70541-05 to Bernice T. Eiduson, Ph.D., and by the United States Public Health Service Grant No. 2 R01 MH 24947-04, and Carnegie Corporation Grant B-3970-04.

[2] We deeply appreciate the statistical analysis provided by Max R. Mickey, Ph.D., Department of Biostatistics, one of the senior investigators on the project. Other senior investigators who directed the data collection and analytic effort were Jannette Alexander, M.S.W., Jerome Cohen, Ph.D., and Thomas S. Weisner, Ph.D.

Paper presented at the American Psychological Convention, San Francisco, August 27, 1977.

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The impact of single versus multiple parenting practices on the cognitive and socioemotional development of the infant and young child has become a central issue in developmental psychology. With the changes in women's roles and growing employment of women, variations from the traditional mother-child model so long considered characteristic of child rearing, are increasingly seen. As early as 1958, Pease and Gardner (1958) discussed "noncontinuous mothering." Yarrow (1961) considered "multiple mothering"; Caldwell, Hersher, Lipton, Ruchmond, Stern, Eddy, Drachma and Rothman (1963) used the terms monomatric and polymatric to indicate mothering by one or several figures, while Cohen (1977) discussed "surrogate caregiving." Typically, these studies involved working mothers or teenage parents, and focused on older children (Etauch, 1974). The women's movement and the search for "fulfillment" can be seen as another source of changing patterns of mothering, observed in such current life styles as communes and living groups. A naturalistic longitudinal study of infants being reared in a variety of family life styles offered a unique opportunity to evaluate the impact of differing parenting patterns on aspects of development at one year (Eiduson, 1974).

Fifty infants born to single mothers who headed their family units (SM) were compared with 50 infants of mothers in communal living groups where multiple caretaking could take place (LG), and with a group of 100 children born into two-parent nuclear families. Fifty of these latter were in traditional families (TM), and 50 in social contract units of unwed couples (SC).

All parents were Caucasian, between the ages of 18 and 35, and primarily from middle-class or stable working-class families of origin. Two-thirds of the infants were first children; a third were second born. The effects on

single versus multiple caretaking seemed particularly important to investigate in these families, since one of the rationales for moving into living groups or communities was the opportunity these families provided for shared child care within the home (Kornfein, Weisner & Martin, 1976).

Methodology

In this study we proposed to examine developmental measures obtained through assessment of infants at eight months and one year of age in order to establish the extent to which caretaking differences affected early developmental outcomes.

Eight measures were utilized as outcome data: four derived from scores obtained on the mental and motor Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Bayley, 1969), at eight months and one year (MDI, PDI, MDI-1, PDI-1), and four from the Stranger Situation Test (Ainsworth, 1970), which was administered at one year. Two of the latter pertained to ability to recover from distress as indicated by the amount of play behavior following separation from the mother and remaining alone; and the amount of play behavior when the stranger returned during the mother's absence. Two other outcome scores referred to the response of the baby to the mother's return following her temporary "abandonment" of the child. Following the scoring developed by Ainsworth and Bell (1970), and used by many other investigators (Waters, 1977), the pattern of behavior shown by the child was categorized in terms of three kinds of adjustment to the separation: (a) calm; (b) normal separation anxiety; and (c) distressed separation anxiety; and then expanded into an eight step version of these three categories.

All infants had been assessed at birth to determine neurological status and to identify high-risk infants who might demand special caretaking. On the Obstetrical Complications Scale (Littman & Parmalee, 1974), and the Newborn

Neurological Examination (Parmalee & Michaelis, 1974), only six out of the total sample appeared at risk. However, these children were randomly distributed by life style. Therefore, no special demands for caretaking on the basis of physical status at birth characterized the single, two-parent or multiple families differentially.

Results

Relationship of Parenting Mode to Bayley Scores: At eight months, the infants were seen in the home, and cognitive and motor development were assessed with the Bayley Scales of Infant Development. The babies were on the whole normal, closely approximating the standardization sample (MDI 103.6 $\pm$ 14.54; PDI 105.6 $\pm$ 12.07). When the Mental Scale was considered by family style, differences were not significant ($p=.06$), although the means of infants of the two-parent family groupings were higher than the mean of infants being raised in living groups.

When the Motor Scale (PDI) was considered, parenting style differences just reach significance ($p=.05$). Here, the mean of infants in two-parent unwed families, at 107 surpassed the mean of babies in multiple parenting families at 102. Both single mothers' and traditional mothers' infants were closer to those of the two-parent unweds than to infants in multiple caretaking situations.

When Bayleys were readministered at one year, the correlations between the eight months and one year measures were low but significant: MDI $r=.17$, $p=.05$; PDI $r=.31$, $p=.01$. However, neither MDI nor PDI differentiated between parenting family styles at one year ($p=.82$ and .14 respectively).

When the extent of the change from eight months to one year was examined, mean MDI scores for the total sample increased by six points, while PDI scores decreased by seven points. Differences were significant at the .001 level.

When these are compared with life style, MDI scores increased most for the experimental group infants of multiple caretaking situations and single mothers, less for the two-parent unweds and hardly at all for infants in two-parent married families. In contrast, the PDI mean scores decreased significantly for all infants, although the least decrease was for infants in the traditional parent families (five versus seven to nine points).

Relationship of Parenting Mode to Stranger Test: The Stranger Test, which provided an early opportunity to explore status of socioemotional development of the very young child, showed that the attachment of infants to their mothers was strong and similar to that reported in the literature. Of the total sample, 76 percent showed a secure attachment (B type), 15 percent were calm or uninvolved (A type), and only nine percent were insecurely attached (C type). This can be compared to the Waters (1976) study in which 64 percent were securely attached, 21 percent calm, and 15 percent insecurely attached. When explored by parenting style, differences were not significant ($p=.42$).

The other measures of socioemotional development drawn from the Stranger Test were the amount of play behavior both when the child was separated from the mother and left to play alone and when a "stranger" rather than the mother was present.

Differences in the above situation were slight. About half of the children did not play at all when alone, with TM children least likely to be immobilized. However, differences were not significant ($p=.36$). When the Stranger was available, again about half the children failed to play (differences not significant - $p=.42$), but here, fewer of the control children (SC and TM) played with Stranger present than when alone, while more SM and LG children were able to play with the supportive presence of the Stranger.

Actually, LG children were the most active players both alone and with the Stranger, and thus might be considered to be most accepting of a stranger.

Relationship of Specific Caretaking Items to Outcome Data: The failure to discern differences between children from widely varying life styles leads us to question the extent to which single versus multiple caretaking categories truly reflect the kinds of different child care anticipated in dissimilar family milieus. The varying definitions in the literature of single and multiple parenting suggests that such labels may be applied to so wide a range of socialization experiences that development can be influenced in a variety of ways. In the Family Style study, we were fortunate to be able to collect systematic socialization data periodically through a combination of direct home observation, and parent reports (interviews and questionnaires). From this data base, a group of 52 items gleaned from information about caretaking practices from birth to one year were selected. The items referred to number of caretakers used customarily, caretakers occasionally used by mother, as when she went out, or was away overnight, or out of town, plus the supplementary data on frequency and length of time over which child was with others, mother's activities, such as work, school and community involvement, and the relationship of these to child caretaking functions. Also measured were such aspects as the proportion of time mother was child-occupied versus other-occupied during home observations.

Subsequently, a factor analysis (varimax rotation) was performed on the 52 items, which retained ten factors. These factors were entered into a step-wise regression as independent variables, with two macrovariables, the sum of the intellectual scores and the ABC scores of the Stranger Test, as dependent variables. Results showed significant but not strong relationships

between Bayley measures and three of these factors, which accounted for about 10 percent of the variance. Items loading on the first Factor related to size of the Family Unit such as number of people in the home (.87), number of females (.79), number of children (.71), number of kin (.50), number of females in the living group situation (.30), and the amount of activity focused on other than the baby during observations taken in the home (.41). The second Factor related to the extent to which child care occupied the Mother, as compared to her other activities: has baby taken care most of time (.56), people with whom you leave baby (-.53), mother working (.50), or in activities other than parenting (-.49). The third Factor, Availability of Other Caretakers to Baby, considered how many were primary caretakers of the total "family" unit (.62), and included the total number of children needing caretaking (-.52).

No significant relationship emerged when these ten factors were correlated to the Strange Situation Test outcome scores (ABC and expanded ABC) as the dependent variable.

Discussion

It appears, therefore, as if few of no significant differences in infant cognitive development or in response to the separation from the mother in a standardized situation at one year can be attributed to family milieus that differ in parenting mode. This is the case when parenting mode is defined either by the simple parenting paradigm - single, multiple, or two-parent - or by specific socialization practices that these caretaking conditions embrance.

One observation is worthy of note: At the six-month home observation, regardless of family style, mothers were primary caretakers of 95 percent of the children. Except for a few cases of infants in 24-hour nurseries, only in those homes where mothers were physically or emotionally disabled was there

separation from the biological mother at this point. As for fathers, some men participated in child care, with the unwed couple and living group fathers being more available and involved. At six months, a few babies move into 24-hour nurseries as caretaking units, with appointed caretakers for an entire group of children, but neither this practice for some in the multiple caretaking group, nor the differntial employment pattern of single mothers (close to 30 percent were working) has yet influenced developmental outcome scores.

It appears, therefore, that despite the fact that the 200 children lived in physical and social environments that were diverse in composition, structure and functional organization (Eiduson, & Weisner, 1977), and that mother's roles varied (Weisner, 1976), the experience for the child, especially of mother and child, did not differ significantly enought to effect behaviors (intelligence scores and separation responses) that are regarded as having a prominent genetic determination, as in the case of intelligence, or part of the invariant maturational sequence, in the case of separation from the mother and confrontation by the stranger at one year of age.

As children become more mobile, and mothers assume other activities, we anticipate that the experiences going into single or multiple parenting paradigms may become more differentiated. If this proves to be the case, we will have a further opportunity to see the effects of parenting modes on child behaviors. However, at this point, we conclude that at one year of age, single versus multiple parenting styles does not influence intellectual test scores or responses to the separation experience.

BAYLEY SCALES OF INFANT DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTERED

AT EIGHT MONTHS AND ONE YEAR AND COMPARED BY LIFE STYLE

MDI-8 months* N200			MDI-1 year* N205			Test-retest	
	M	S.D.		M	S.D.	d	p
Total	103.62	±14.94	Total	109.64	±10.64	6.27	.001
SC	103.66	13.85	SC	110.42	11.16	6.86	.01
SM	102.31	13.07	SM	109.42	12.25	7.77	.001
TM	108.10	17.56	TM	108.58	9.37	0.51	ns
LG	100.31	14.09	LG	110.11	9.92	9.98	.001
	p.06			p.82			

PDI-8 months* N200			PDI-1 year* N205			Test-retest	
	M	S.D.		M	S.D.	d	p
Total	105.57	±12.07	Total	98.30	±13.54	-7.27	.001
SC	107.44	11.21	SC	100.25	11.67	-7.63	.001
SM	107.96	11.82	SM	98.81	13.77	-9.10	.001
TM	105.16	11.86	TM	99.58	13.10	-5.12	.05
LG	101.90	12.74	LG	94.68	15.04	-7.34	.01
	p.05			p.14			

Correlations

	MDI-8 mo.*	PDI-8 mo.*	MDI-1 year*
MDI-8 mo.*	-		
PDI-8 mo.*	.45**	-	
MDI-1 year*	.21**	.22**	-
PDI-1 year*	.19**	.35**	.33**

*Scores adjusted for age differences

** Significant at .01 level

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